

VZCZCXRO6046  
OO RUEHGA RUEHHA RUEHMT RUEHQU RUEHVC  
DE RUEHOT #1426/01 3121758  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 071758Z NOV 08  
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8706  
INFO RUCNCAN/ALL CANADIAN POSTS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 001426

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CA](#)  
SUBJECT: NEW FOREIGN MINISTER LAWRENCE CANNON

REF: OTTAWA 1394

11. (SBU) Summary: On October 30, Lawrence Cannon became Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs in Prime Minister Stephen Harper's second Conservative government (reftel). Cannon is an experienced and competent administrator who is likely to provide stability to a department that has had four ministers since the Conservatives took office in 2006. Cannon appears to have the confidence of the PM to handle this senior portfolio and the important bilateral Canada-U.S. relationship; he was a Conservative Party observer at the 2008 Democratic Convention. End summary.

-----  
A POLITICAL FAMILY  
-----

12. (U) Lawrence Cannon was born on December 6, 1947 in Quebec City, Quebec. The son of a francophone father and an Anglophone mother, Cannon is of Irish and French-Canadian descent. The extended Cannon family has a history of public service and includes Supreme Court judges, senators, and politicians among its members. Both of Cannon's grandfathers were members of Parliament. His maternal grandfather served in Liberal cabinets as Minister of Pensions and Health in the 1930s, as well as Minister of National Defence for Air during World War II, when he presided over the expansion of the Royal Canadian Air Force. He later became a senator.

13. (U) Cannon graduated with a B.A. degree in political science from the Universit  de Montral in 1971. Between 1971 and 1976, he worked in the office of Quebec Liberal then-Premier Robert Bourassa as a political assistant. He graduated with a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree from Universit  Laval in Quebec City in 1979, and worked in the private sector as a financial analyst,

before heading Les Radiateurs Roy Lte, the largest aftermarket manufacturer of radiators in Quebec, from 1981 to 1985. From 1979 to 1985, he was also a municipal councilor for the town of Cap Rouge, now a suburb of Quebec City.

-----  
A LIBERAL IN PROVINCIAL POLITICS  
-----

14. (U) In December 1985, Cannon entered provincial politics, winning the riding of La Peltrie as a Liberal member of Quebec's provincial legislature. As Parliamentary Assistant to the [Quebec] Minister for International Trade and Economic Development from 1985 to 1988, he participated in bilateral negotiations leading to the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 1988. He held several provincial Cabinet positions under then-Premier Bourassa, including Foreign Trade and Technological Development, Tourism, Transport, and Communications. He also served as Deputy Speaker of the provincial legislature from 1989 to 1991.

15. (U) After the defeat of the Liberal government in the 1994 Quebec provincial election, Cannon became vice-president of Unitel (now AT & T Canada Corp). At the same time, he became a founding partner of Group Cannon and Associates, as well as a senior consultant with GPC International, advising private sector clients on communications and

public affairs. In 2001, he re-entered municipal politics by winning election as councilor for the City of Gatineau (Quebec), a francophone community that, together with Ottawa (Ontario), makes up the Canadian National Capital Region.

-----  
CHANGING COLORS: SWITCH TO THE CONSERVATIVES  
-----

¶6. (U) Cannon actively supported the federal Liberal leadership bid of Sheila Copps in 2000 in the race that Jean Chretien subsequently won. Cannon switched his political allegiance from the Liberals to the federal Conservative Party in 2005. In September 2005, the federal Conservative Party in 2005. In September 2005, Conservative leader -- at the time, the leader of the Official Opposition -- Stephen Harper appointed him deputy chief of staff and deputy executive director of the federal Conservative Party. Cannon won the rural West Quebec riding of Pontiac handily as a Conservative in the January 2006 federal election, scoring an upset victory in a staunchly Liberal riding that had elected federal Liberals for all but nine years since 1935.

¶7. (U) As the only member of a new crop of Quebec Conservative MPs -- and one of very few in the national Conservative caucus with experience in government -- Cannon seemed destined for a senior Cabinet post, possibly deputy Prime Minister, when the Conservatives took office in February 2006. However, new PM Harper declined to name a deputy PM, and instead appointed Cannon Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities on February 6, 2006. In this federal department, Cannon was responsible for distributing important federal infrastructure and construction contracts nationwide, but from a political perspective most importantly in Quebec, where the Conservatives were seeking greater support.

OTTAWA 00001426 002 OF 002

Harper also appointed Cannon his political "lieutenant" -- or senior political minister -- for Quebec.

-----  
MAJOR PROMOTION  
-----

¶8. (U) In the Conservatives' second minority government following the October 14, 2008 election, PM Harper promoted Cannon to Minister of Foreign Affairs on October 30. Observers saw the assignment as one of the biggest promotions in the new mandate, but Cannon had reportedly lobbied instead for the Industry portfolio, with added responsibility for Quebec regional development. In addition to his senior portfolio, Harper also appointed Cannon as Vice-Chair of the powerful Priorities and Planning Committee of Cabinet, arguably the most important of all Cabinet committees. The planning Committee directs government priorities and is the only one that the Prime Minister personally chairs. As foreign minister, Cannon also sits on Cabinet Committees on Foreign Affairs and Security and on Afghanistan.

¶9. (U) Cannon is fully fluent in French and English. Observers consider him a "red" or liberal Conservative on social issues (for example, he strongly supports same-sex marriage), but conservative on fiscal matters. He has won high marks as a competent administrator and as a trusted advisor to PM Harper. He has travelled widely in Europe and the Americas, both in and out of public life. The Conservative Party dispatched him to the Democratic Convention in Denver in August 2008 as an observer. In 2001, he was appointed to the Board of the World Commerce Institute and as President and General Manager of AmeriContact for the Quebec City Summit of the Americas in Quebec City that took place in April 2001. He is married to his second wife, Christine.

WILKINS